



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Farewell Comments**

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
July 14, 2005

Mr. Chairman, Ambassador Kothbauer, dear Colleagues and Friends.

I address you in these terms of friendship and endearment because you have become that – true, dear friends, representatives of countries, representing your peoples. Peoples who seek the opportunity to have a better life, to live in peace, to pursue a livelihood of their choosing, to decide freely who will govern them, to decide whom and how to worship, how to educate their children, how to enjoy the fruits of their labor.

The entire course of modern history has shown that only countries that are democracies are able to offer these choices to their peoples. It is remarkable to note that about 50% of the world's population today enjoys freedom and liberty. However, another 50% does not and it is our solemn responsibility to help the 50% who are "haves" to preserve democracy, and to help the 50% who are "have-nots" attain it!

The great battles of the past century were fought between the forces of freedom and the forces of oppression, and freedom won! That victory is ours and it will not be re-negotiated. But it requires vigilance so that no excuse, no argument no matter how loud, no matter how forceful, no matter how deceptively reasonable it may sound, will deter us from sharing freedom and liberty with peoples everywhere. In the quest for human dignity we will give no quarter, no space, no rest to our opponents. Our creed, as so magnificently spoken by President Bush, is: no one deserves to be a master, and no one deserves to be a slave! The defense and the spread of these principles will engage us forever, but we will never tire!

We, those of us in this great hall this morning, have the greatest honor that our peoples can bestow on us . . . the fiduciary responsibility to carry the torch of freedom, first, as an affirmation of victory. Second, as a tribute to the tens of millions who lost their lives in the last century in those great battles. Third, as one way of saying we will never forget, of saying "you did not die in vain". And, fourth, as a beacon for those who are yet walking the path out of darkness and oppression towards the goal of liberty and freedom.

We are the torchbearers right now in this great common cause. Words alone cannot express how honored I have been that President Bush sent me here as his personal representative for the American people, to be a member of the OSCE team of nations for almost four of the most satisfying years of my life and of the life of my dear, dear wife, Dede.

Much as we have enjoyed this labor, however, I wrote President Bush that it was "time to move on", time to resign my commission as a United States Ambassador. Time to be, once again, just an ordinary citizen. No more "your excellency", no more "Mr. Ambassador". Next Friday, July 22, I return to being "Stephan Minikes". Perhaps, to being called "Mr.". But, more likely, even to perfect strangers I am sure I will be plain old "Steve", and that's OK too! That's egalitarian America!

The tradition of the citizen – public servant has always been one of America's greatest strengths! It was started when George Washington surrendered his commission as an army general after winning the revolutionary war. He could have become King or dictator. Some urged that on him. He could have clung to the accoutrements of power and privilege and rank, but he knew that democracy required the cleansing tide of the peaceful, change of leadership.

The great Israeli diplomat and statesman, Abba Eban, told a similar story in his book "Diplomacy in the Next Century". When Harry Truman's term ended, he and his wife Bess traveled down Pennsylvania Avenue to Union Station to take the train back to Missouri from where he came. No fanfare, no trumpets, no ceremony, not even secret service officers. Just he and his wife and a few friends to join him for a good round of poker on the ride back. And so he exited. And all he had done was change the world.

Well, colleagues, you and I didn't change the world . . . but, collectively, we made a difference in millions of lives. Don't we wish for that type of humble, dedicated leadership for so many leaders in states that are not fully democratic; Presidents and Prime Ministers who so desperately and at any cost cling to power as if it was somehow theirs to own . . . those who, in the words of E.M. Foster, referring to the hapless Claudius in Hamlet, "constantly play the ace as if others are about to pay the king". It is our job to see that perspective change . . . to see to it that the relationship between the governing and the governed can be changed peacefully through the exercise of the right to vote in free and fair democratic elections and through institutions that support that right and that are steady as bedrock!

So, my dear, dear friends, carry on this noble work. This work of generations. You, no more than I, are expected to complete the work. But, having accepted your ambassadorship and your countries being members of OSCE, neither are you or your countries free to desist from this work.

As OSCE moves through its summer term and into the fall, and as I pass the torch of liberty to my friend, Julie Finley, as our next Ambassador to the OSCE, I know you will continue to build bridges from the comfortable shores of the known and of the possible, to the shores of the unknown, the uncertain, the fearful. That is the ultimate challenge of the art of diplomacy and that is why, I trust, you chose diplomacy as a career.

As you formulate OSCE's future, engage, discuss, listen, respect, but never give up your principles – never yield to the temptation of thinking, to take an example right at hand, that even one life of an Uzbek refugee in Kyrgyzstan or Kazakhstan does not matter. It does, so very much, because of the inherent value of life itself and because it is a proxy for you, your loved ones, indeed for all mankind. Remember that when even the thought of compromise of principles tries to prey on our intellect or emotion, to cheat us of what we know to be right, by rationalizing that we will get "something" in return, the victory thus achieved will be a mirage and you will, I tell you with certainty, believe it, count on it, lose everything - - your principles and the "something else".

So, friends, fight for and defend valiantly the principles embodied in the Helsinki Final Act that are at the core of this great organization which is, in Dr. Rice's own words spoken on

July 1 at the opening session of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Washington, D.C., “a centerpiece of American Foreign Policy”.

Mr. Chairman, fellow Ambassadors, Heads of Missions of OSCE’s 18 field presences, all of you who so loyally and admirably serve here in Vienna in the 54 Missions of Participating States, and those who serve so commendably in the Secretariat and, above all, to the extraordinary staff in my Mission who serve in the most honorable tradition of service in the United States Department of State, I salute you, thank you, and bid you farewell!

I assure you, we will all work together again at another time in another place in a great common cause! We must. We have no choice, nor do we want one.